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## **THE ILLUSION OF LOVE: A STUDY OF DUPING AND DECEPTION IN *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM***

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the role of duping in Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The paper argues that Shakespeare uses duping as a plot device to reveal inconsistencies in love and to create obstacles for the characters. filled with intrigue, manipulation, and deception. The theme of duping and deception is woven throughout the play and is portrayed through the actions of the characters, the language used, and the overall structure of the play. This research paper examines the various forms of deception employed in the play, from the mischievous tricks of Puck to the duplicitous actions of the lovers and the play's central figures, Titania and Oberon. The paper analyzes how deception is used as a means of achieving personal gain, maintaining power, and manipulating others. The paper delves into the ways in which Shakespeare highlights the darker aspects of deception and the consequences that follow. It explores the themes of love and desire and how they can be used as a tool for manipulation and deception. The paper draws on a range of literary and cultural sources to contextualize the play's themes and examine the ways in which deception reinforces power. The paper concludes that the theme of deception in *Midsummer Night's Dream* highlights the darker aspects of human nature and provides an insight into the human condition. It examines how power struggles often lead to duping and why it is a crucial element in comedies. The paper also considers how the play within the play element deconstructs theatrical duping, and how love is closely intertwined with the act of duping. Additionally, the paper discusses the relationship between comedy and tragedy in Shakespeare's works and how duping can expose the flaws of the duped. Finally, the paper explores the use of duping as a device for critiquing the presumptions and romantic treatment of love.

### **Keywords**

Comedy, Duping, Love, Marriage, Power Struggles, Agency, Gender, Illusion, Theatre, Audience.

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Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* thematic concerns are predominantly centred on love and marriage. The play strives to establish conjugal felicity while paradoxically portraying the inconsistencies in love that are revealed through duping. We find in the play conflicts in the union of lovers Lysander and Hermia, unrequited love of Demetrius and Helena, imminent marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta and the quarrel between fairy king and queen Oberon and Titania that has cosmic repercussions. We traverse a truncated landscape of obstacles in the union of the couples, aptly put by Lysander, "The course of true love never did runsmooth" (I. i. 134) where love is thwarted and finally a resolution, where not one but three marriages take place.

In this paper I shall attempt to show how the obstacles arise out of duping, the plot device that Shakespeare exploits adroitly and it is eventually through duping that the perfectly matched couples unite. The paper also expounds how duping arises from power struggles and why it is a crucial element in comedies.

The play opens with the declaration of the Duke of Athens Theseus and the Amazonian queen Hippolyta's marriage in four days. The predicted comedy with a happy ending becomes uncertain when the glory of this moment is soon marred by the entry of Egeus, who brings forth a complaint about his daughter Hermia's refusal to marry Demetrius, the man he chose for her. Instead, Hermia tries to subvert the patriarchal insinuation of "to you your father should be as a god" (I. i. 47) by wishing to marry Lysander, a man she loves. Her attempt to defy her father's wishes and asserting her agency can be seen as duping, wherein she had tricked Egeus and even attempts to elope with Lysander, away from Athens, even attempting to dupe Theseus and the law of the Athenian state. It raises the question of who has the power to dupe, the one who is hierarchically superior or the one without power?

According to Greenblatt, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play that explores the limits of power, especially in the context of love and desire. He argues that the play is a critique of the prevailing patriarchal norms of the time, where men held power over women and their romantic choices. Greenblatt suggests that the play uses the motif of duping to subvert these norms and create a space for women to assert their agency. He remarks how "the action of A

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Midsummer Night's Dream is structured as a series of deceptions, improvisations, and ruptures of conventional boundaries."

The audience is not exempt from the maneuverings of duping either. The play within the play element is also a theatrical illusion. The play of Pyramus and Thisbe is being enacted by Bottom, Quince and other working-class people in the play that the audience are participating in. Bottom's remarks about how, "I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus but Bottom the weaver" (III. i. 19) deconstructs the theatrical duping that we experience as spectators. The instance where the actor playing the role of lion is asked to make his face more visible so as not to scare the ladies induces humor in addition to an attempt to dismantle the illusion they are intent on fabricating, "that their duping might be too successful." (Lucking, 4) Even this play, which is meant to be a sincere effort to entertain, is full of deception. The characters pretend to be someone they are not, and the audience is deceived into believing that they are watching a tragedy rather than a comedy. Deception serves to disrupt social norms and hierarchies and to create a world of confusion and misunderstanding. It is ultimately resolved through the power of love and the imagination, but not before causing chaos and turmoil.

Through Helena's actions, we see a different kind of duping. Helena wishes to transform herself into Hermia to gain Demetrius' affection. This repressed desire can be interpreted as duping. To Helena, Hermia is an embodiment of all that she herself lacks and asks her to "teach me how to look and with what art you sway the motion of Demetris' heart." (I. i. 191) Her subsequent duping of Hermia by revealing to Demetrius her and Lysander's plan of elopement only to gain favor in Demetrius' eyes reveals how love is closely intertwined with the act of duping, where one can even dupe their loved ones only to attain love somewhere else. Chaos and discord ensue when the two friends are led to believe and accuse each other of duping. Hermia thinks that Helena stole away Lysander from her while Helena thinks that Hermia joined the two men in mocking her, both oblivious to the fact that they are being duped by fairies. These duping hurts both Helena and Hermia and causes them to quarrel with each other.

Northrop Frye argues that the play's central themes of illusion and deception are conveyed through the use of mirrors, shadows, and doubles. According to Frye, these motifs suggest a transformative power that goes beyond the ordinary, creating a dreamlike atmosphere that blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Frye notes that the play makes frequent use of mirrors, which often reflect the characters' desires and fears rather than their actual appearance. For example, when Helena laments her unrequited love for Demetrius, she compares herself to Hermia in a mirror, but the image she sees is distorted and unrecognizable. This, Frye argues, is symbolic of the play's larger theme of illusion, as the mirror reveals the characters' true desires but does not reflect reality. Similarly, Frye suggests that the play's use of shadows and doubles contributes to its dreamlike atmosphere. The characters frequently encounter their own shadows, which seem to take on a life of their own and mock their actions. Additionally, several characters have doubles or doppelgangers, such as the two sets of lovers who are physically indistinguishable from one another. Frye argues that these motifs emphasize the play's theme of deception, as they create a sense of confusion and uncertainty about what is real and what is not. Ultimately, Frye contends that the play's use of mirrors, shadows, and doubles creates a world of transformation and metamorphosis, where the characters' desires and fears become malleable and interchangeable. This, in turn, highlights the play's larger theme of the power of love to transform and transcend the ordinary.

To think that all this chaos was a result of Oberon's jealousy over Titania taking care of a changeling is quite revealing. Unlike what we have seen previously in Helena and Hermia's instances of duping where they duped from the position of no power, we witness Oberon exploiting his power by creating discord through duping those who are less powerful than he is. Comedy has its foundations in exclusion and marginalization, wherein the flaws of the duped is exposed, making him/her a laughing stock. This impression is corroborated in the treatment of Bottom whose head is transformed into an ass by Puck, Oberon's fairy. In another Shakespearean comedy *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio's duping and his treatment in the dark house and declaring him a madman, all because he was tricked to believe his mistress loved him makes us question whether Shakespeare's comedy is pure comedy or a "mixture of the comic and the tragic, in which comic elements predominate" (Draper, 99)

One is led to ask the question that if duping creates such a welter of tangled threads, why is it so popular in plays and why does every comedy use it as a plot device? Not only does duping help in inducing humor (often dark) but it is also an excellent comic exposure of the romantic treatment of love, where duping and sight are intricately linked. The device of duping enables us to critique the presumptions and the way we view love. Puck, who puts into action the discord and chaos in the play, is asked to apply the love juice over Titania's eyes that makes her fall in love with the "next live creature" she sees. Puck's duping of Bottom by transmogrifying him into an ass head and Titania's enamoring of Bottom, and the instance where both Lysander and Demetrius fall in love with Helena under the influence of the love juice makes us pay attention to the obfuscated truth that love can be inconstant, arbitrary, and more often than not guided through vision and superficiality. From detesting Helena, Demetrius is duped into seeing her as a "goddess, nymph, perfect, divine" (III. ii. 137) reiterating the fickleness of love and exposing that it is contingent on circumstances and external factors. This view is corroborated by Stephen Booth who adumbrates, "The play is a study of the ways in which love can deceive, transform, and elude us, and of the power of the imagination to create and destroy illusions." Nevertheless, the consequence of this duping proved to be felicitous to Demetrius and Helena, who found love in each other. Nevertheless, the consequence of this duping proved to be felicitous to Demetrius and Helena, who found love in each other.

Some critics argue that the play's use of deception reinforces societal norms and power structures. For example, the male characters in the play use deception to manipulate the female characters, ultimately reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics. Additionally, the play's happy ending can be seen as a reinforcement of the status quo, as the characters who are "meant to be" together end up married and happy while those who deviate from societal norms (like the fairy queen Titania, who falls in love with a donkey-headed man) are punished or marginalized.

The play's end resolves the conundrum, though the inner conflicts and vicissitudes remain. By tampering with the relationships between the lovers through the plot device of duping, the play proves that the very notion of love is arbitrary. Duping, on the one hand adumbrates the debilitation of lovers at the hands of supernatural elements while on the other hand brings the right couples together. It foregrounds both the importance and the limitations of love as we perceive it.

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